

A Refresher on Prayer

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Good morning, GraceLife. I'm so happy that you're here this morning knowing that you come with hearts that are eager to hear the word of God and to apply it to your lives; we have such a message here this morning. Several weeks ago I had the opportunity to teach at a pastor's breakfast back in the great state of Indiana on the topic of how to teach your people on prayer, and as I was teaching that day, it came to my mind that everything that I said there was not stuff that I had distilled in GraceLife and that was not too good if I'm saying this is what you need to teach your people on prayer. I need to make sure that that's clear to my own flock and so that's what I'm going to clear up today so that if any of those guys call me back and say, "How did your people respond when you said those things?" I'll actually have an answer to give to them.

I'm not going to dwell on the fact that we all fall short on prayer. We live in a self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-promoting culture that directly opposes the humble dependent spirit of prayer that the Bible calls the disciples of Jesus Christ to manifest. The weight of our environment is against us and not only that, our own hearts, as the hymn writer said, are prone to wander. Prone to wander, that's with an "a"; wander from the God we love. We pursue a trajectory of prayer in the sincerity of our hearts at the moment but the weight of our environment and the weight of our own indwelling sin and our own forgetfulness gradually pulls us away from that straight line that we would like to pursue and I've come to the conviction in my own pastoral ministry that the need for that teaches us that it's not enough for a pastor to simply teach one series on prayer and then consider the matter settled as though 10 years from now you're going to continue to remember the things that were said back in 1999 or whatever the case may be; it's not enough to teach one time and expect your people to get it and to retain it over all that time because, look, I couldn't tell you what I taught six weeks ago and so it's kind of unrealistic to expect your people to remember things and to keep those things fresh on and on and on and on. No, what we need to do is we need to continually repeatedly come back to the matter of prayer so that there is always these course corrections that we can make in our walks with the Lord. You know, as we start to drift, you come back. You start to drift you come back and I think it's the responsibility of the pastor to keep these things in front of the flock of Christ so that we can protect ourselves from that kind of spiritual drift to which we are all subject to.

So I want to invite you to turn to Matthew 6. I'm just going to read this text. We're not going to spend a whole lot of time on it here but the whole idea here this morning is to

help us stay true in prayer; to bring us back to that intimacy in our lives of prayer that we all desire as Christians but that we know that we fall short of and drift away from just over the weight and the passage of time. This morning's message is going to help you with this greatly. I am trusting the Lord for that. Jesus said in Matthew 6:9-13, he said,

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'"

The question this morning is: how can you stay true in prayer? What is it that lays the groundwork for that? And as I'll say later in the message, our tendency is when we realize that we're starting to drift is that we want to renew our commitment and we say, "Okay, I'm going to try harder now. Now I'm really going to get serious about getting up early. Now I'm really going to get serious about 30 minutes, 45 minutes," whatever time frame you want to suggest, "and I'm going to be serious and I'm going to stay committed to that now." Well, I don't know what makes us think that after our 10th or 12th or 15th effort at that that it's going to be any different going forward. The truth of the matter is that we're just prone to drift and that we need to think more deeply about these matters and establish deeper pillars, deeper principles in our hearts that will keep us true. It's not the strength of your commitment that will ultimately carry the day, it's the strength of these biblical principles that set the context around the passage that I just read that will cultivate your approach to prayer over time as you seek to live your life for the glory of God.

What I want to do, I want to take the context, the overall context of this passage in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, to give you six different principles to cultivate your approach to prayer. This is a refresher. I'm not going to give you anything brand-new here but I do want to synthesize it for you in a way that we haven't done before, that I haven't done before in GraceLife, anyway, and just understand, I want you to be able to assimilate this in the right way. What I'm going to share with you this morning is not a quick fix for your poor prayer life, it's nothing mechanical; I'm not going to tell you how to set your alarm and get up in time or all of that. That's all a waste of time in the long run. Rather, what we need, what cultivates a good prayer life over time are the biblical attitudes that Jesus is teaching throughout the Sermon on the Mount. You come back to these defining attitudes time and time again. These become guiding factors in your whole mindset toward which you approach the Christian life and then, in turn, it becomes the mindset with which you pray, not just once during the day but throughout the day and throughout life. These are the foundational principles that guide a lifetime of walking with Christ.

So here's what we're going to look at, these six principles here this morning and I'm very happy to be able to share this with you. How do you approach prayer? First principle that I want to suggest to you this morning, the first principle when you're thinking about prayer is that you need to remember the authority of Jesus Christ. Remember the authority of Christ when you think about prayer. Jesus has told his disciples how he

wants them to pray. That preempts the whole discussion. It's not a matter of us coming up with different formulas or coming up with different strategies or simply gushing out whatever thought comes to our mind when we go to prayer, we need to start from the foundational principle that Jesus Christ has instructed his disciples on how they should pray. We start with the fundamental premise that we recognize the authority of Christ in all areas of life, we submit to him in all areas of life, and as a subset of that fundamental premise, we submit to him in the matter of prayer. You pray...when you go to prayer, you're not the initiator, you are praying in response to what Christ has already said in his word. That's very important.

Now, in the Sermon on the Mount, I want you to see a few different things here. I just want you to see in the Sermon on the Mount how repeatedly Jesus points to his own authority as the deciding factor in what is true and in what is right. That is the environment in which the Lord's prayer is delivered in Matthew 6. Look, for example, just in Matthew 5:20. In Matthew 5, Jesus is setting over his true teaching about the nature of the law of God against the false teaching which the Pharisees had been imposing upon the people for far too long. Jesus is born into the world, he begins his public ministry and he gives this instruction to clarify the true nature of the law of God and there is one simple thing that I want you to see: when he teaches, he simply says, "I say." Look at chapter 5, verse 20, he says, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Look at verse 22, "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court." Look at verse 26, "I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent." Verse 28, "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Look at verse 32, "I say to you." Verse 39, "I say to you." Verse 34, "I say to you." Verse 44, "I say to you." Chapter 6, verse 2, in his teaching on giving, he says, "I say to you, they have their reward in full." The end of verse 5, "I say to you, they have their reward in full." Verse 16, "I say to you, they have their reward in full."

When you think about it, that is just stunning. Jesus is teaching on his authority that this is what the nature of the law of God requires. He is stating truth based on his own personal authority; he is not appealing to anything higher. He's not saying, "The scribes say. The rabbis have said." He says, "I say to you." It is a matter of assertion of his own personal authority as he delivers this instruction in the Sermon on the Mount. And notice even when you go to the Lord's prayer, as we call it, chapter 6, verse 9, when he says, "Pray, then, in this way," he's using the imperative mood. He's commanding. He says, "This is how you as my disciple are to pray," and then he lays it out. The point of all of that is that this authority of Christ is what frames the whole approach to prayer. It is the fundamental starting point with which you go to him in prayer. Prayer is a response to the authority of Christ, not a statement of what you want him to do. You go to Christ in response to his authority. What I'm saying is that prayer is framed by an attitude of humble submission to the authority of the Son of God and that's what we have to get straight in our minds. We are praying in submission to him, we are not, as it were, commanding him on what to do. Oh, we make our requests and we'll get into that in a

moment, but over all there is an attitude of humble submission that recognizes his authority.

Now, notice at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus has finished speaking in chapter 7, verse 28, you'll see how this ties in with the response of those who heard Jesus in the first century. When he had said everything that he had to say in the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 7, verse 28, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." That's the point. When you read the Sermon on the Mount and when you read the Lord's prayer and receive the instruction of the Lord's prayer as the matter that frames the way that you pray to the holy God of the universe, you must start by recognizing his authority and praying in response to that. That changes everything. That fundamental principle of the authority of Christ in prayer draws your mind away from your circumstances which is where we tend to focus our time, it draws us away from our self-preoccupation with our circumstances and focuses it over on the person to whom we are praying. Prayer is not the place for us to simply gush out our preoccupation with our circumstances. You elevate your approach to prayer when you realize the authority of the one who commanded it and you focus your attention on the person, not the vertical person, as it were, that you're speaking to, rather than the horizontal things that preoccupy your mind. That is where you have to start. Absent that, prayer simply becomes another expression of our sinful self-centeredness rather than a transcendent interaction with the sovereign of the universe. We recognize the authority of Christ when we pray. That's where it starts and we pray in submission to him. Christ calls you to prayer. He calls you to prayer by his own authority and he has set the principles that he wants to govern prayer in your life and so our responsibility, the way that we line ourselves up with the purposes of God in that, is to train our hearts and to train our minds and to exercise ourselves in prayer in accordance with what Christ has already established for us.

Now, one other thing that that does for us, when you recognize the authority of Christ, when you recognize that he says, "Pray, then, in this way," that he is commanded you to pray. Here's a word of encouragement for those of you that are feeling guilty about the way you have lived your lives over the past several days when you realize that you have fallen short, that you have neglected prayer and all of that. It is the wrong response to say, "I'm not worthy to pray and therefore I'm going to withdraw even further." No, the command of Christ is for you to come and pray even in your sinful unworthy state. You come to him and you approach him because he has commanded you to prayer, not because you are worthy of his presence, and your privilege of prayer is premised on the shed blood of Christ who bought you the forgiveness of your sins and it is premised on the command, "Lord, I know I don't deserve to be here but you have commanded me to come and therefore I come in response to your command. I will obey you at that point even though I have fallen short everywhere else." And his command becomes your encouragement to pray, it becomes the ground upon which you approach him, and you honor him by praying as he has commanded you to do. The authority of Christ frames the way that we pray.

Now, that leads rather naturally into our second point this morning. As we consider this, I'm titling this message, "A Refresher on Prayer," how is it that you refresh your prayer life? Well, secondly, as you remember the authority of Christ, you also, second point here this morning: you cultivate a spirit of repentance. You cultivate a spirit of repentance. When you read the Sermon on the Mount it is so crucial to remember that those opening verses in Matthew 5 are setting forth the character of the disciple of the true kingdom of God and that character carries through in the entire rest of the sermon. It is presupposed, Jesus presupposes these character traits in everything that follows in chapters 5, 6 and 7. And look at how he opens the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5:3. This is the opening salvo, this is the fundamental starting point of Christian character when Jesus says in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." He's talking about a spiritual poverty. He's talking about a spiritual mourning. That is the opening statement, that is the opening blessing that Jesus conveys upon those who hear. He says, "There is blessing reserved exclusively for those who recognize their spiritual poverty and live in light of that." The Christian is a man who is conscious of his spiritual poverty. He realizes that he is unworthy of the kingdom of God by his own merit. He realizes he needs an outside righteousness given to him because he has no intrinsic righteousness of his own with which to approach God. The true Christian is a man, is a woman, is a young person, who realizes that his thoughts, his words and his very life are not worthy of a holy God.

Now, follow me in the context of prayer. When you are conscious of that, when you are conscious of your spiritual poverty, when you are conscious that you do not deserve the presence of God, in fact, you deserve to be banished from the presence of God, when you truly understand your spiritual condition, when you understand that, here's the point, you pray differently. You pray differently when you're mindful of that. You are in the presence of God as a humble supplicant, one humbly asking. You're not there as one to whom God owes something. A man who is poor in spirit, a man who has declared spiritual bankruptcy, to that kind of man, he does not approach God as though God owes him comfortable circumstances and ease of life when he prays. The man in spiritual poverty realizes that, "God, my life by all rights should be much worse than what it is because I've done nothing to earn your favor. God, there is nothing about me that would require you to be favorably disposed to me." And it takes away the sense of entitlement that we all too often fall into in prayer, "God, why do you treat me this way? Why is life so hard for me?" That kind of praying, that kind of attitude betrays a fundamental...it exposes that in your heart you have a sense of entitlement that God owes you something and if you are going to get anywhere in prayer, you have to purge that from your heart.

Listen to what Jeremiah said, the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:39-40, he said, "Why should any living mortal, or any man, Offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the LORD." When you are cultivating a spirit of repentance in your life, when you're examining your ways, you're recognizing that your words and your thoughts and your life fall short of the glory of God, that your heart is marked by threads, if not dominated by ingratitude for all the blessings that he has already given to you, when you are conscious of that and you're mourning over the sinfulness of your own heart and you come to God, "God, I should be so much more than

I am. With all the privileges that you have given me, I am still ungrateful. I am still not a man of your word and of prayer as I should be. O God, I come to you not making demands but seeking mercy and grace." When your heart is framed that way, you're going to pray much, much differently than if you just barge into the presence of God without any sense of self-examination at all. It changes you from a demander to one who is seeking grace and you pray differently that way. When you're conscious of your sinfulness, you're grateful for anything that God gives you rather than complaining that that which in his wisdom he has withheld because you realize that all of God's dealings with you must be in grace because you certainly don't deserve anything else and so you cultivate a spirit of repentance; you're mindful of your own sin and weakness and that frames the way that you pray.

Now, moving in more closely to Matthew 6 here, point 3 here this morning. We're kind of just giving a little overview. The profit of this won't be what I say so much here in the next 20 or 30 minutes, the profit will be in what you do with this after you walk out of the room, right? All I can do is lay these things out for you as aspirations for your soul and trust the Spirit of God to work it out in your heart. Thirdly. We've said that to refresh your prayer life you remember the authority of Christ; you cultivate a spirit of repentance; now thirdly, as you seek to refresh your prayer life: seek to pray better, not longer. Seek to pray better, not longer. As I said earlier, I think we can just assume this that for the vast, vast majority of us whenever we try to fix our broken prayer lives, we usually start by trying to pray longer. "I'm going to get up earlier. I've only been praying 10 minutes, I'm going to pray 30 now. I'm going to be serious about it." Look, that doesn't help and I realize that there are a lot of people that when they hear that your devotional life is messed up, the first thing that they say to you is you've got to establish a pattern and you've got to do this or that and you need to get up early and you've got to have a time and all of that. There's a place for that but that is a totally wrong approach to deal with a broken spiritual life. That is absolutely the wrong place to start. It's starting on external matters and what we really need to do if you're in that position, rather than just saying, "Okay, I'm going to start trying harder," you've got to step back and ask, "Why is it that I got in this position in the first place?" And the reason that you got in the position in the first place was not because you weren't setting your alarm clock early enough, it was because the affections of your heart strayed from the purity and simplicity of devotion to Christ. A man whose thoughts are trained on Christ, a man who recognizes the worth of Christ is not a man who strays away and finds it difficult to cook up 10 or 15 minutes of private devotion with him. When you have strayed, you have lost sight of the greatness and the goodness of Christ and you have to start back there and say, "Oh, this is a reflection of a defect in my heart. This is a reflection of the straying of my affections." So when you are praying poorly, when you are aware of the lack of love for Christ in your life, understand that poor praying is simply a reflection of something that is going on in your heart and that means that you need to start further back. Look, if you want to set your alarm clock for three in the morning, I'm cool with that. Just don't call me because I'm not going to be up. But the point is if you are going to set your alarm for 3 o'clock, wake up prepared to love Christ when you do that, not simply to go through the motions because going through the motions isn't going to carry you through a lifetime. You're going to drift again unless you deal with these fundamental issues.

Look at what Jesus says here. Having said that, you say, "Show that to me in the text." I'll be delighted to show you that exactly in the text. Matthew 6:6, Jesus said, "you, when you pray, go into your inner room." There is that imperative mood again. Jesus Christ, this man from Galilee who also happened to be the incarnate Son of God is telling us how to pray. He is commanding us, "This is what I want my disciples to do. This is how I want my disciples to pray." If you're his disciple, he is speaking right to you now and notice what he says. He says, "go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 7, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." Look at that. Look at verse 7, Jesus says, Jesus is criticizing praying that uses many, many words, that uses repetitious patterns of praying. He's saying, "Don't be like that. That is not the mark of true prayer for my disciples is a thoughtless, meaningless repetition of the same things over and over again." And we can criticize the Catholics for praying that way but the truth of the matter is that inside the walls of the evangelical church, we do the same thing. We get into these tired ruts and we don't even take the time to think freshly about the fact that each time we go to Christ we are approaching the living Son of God. If your spouse or your children approached you and just mechanically spit out the same kinds of words to you day after day, you would be so frustrated with that relationship and you would realize that there was no true love and affection if every time they came to you, "Hi mom, how are you? It is good to see you today. Please fix my food. Please wash my clothes. Please make life better for me. I will be back tomorrow at this same time." Yeah, look, you're not going to get a very good dinner out of mom that way, are you?

You see what I'm saying, right? When you just go to God in a mechanical way and your heart is not engaged, don't think that that's real praying. That's not what the Lord calls us for. It's not what he calls us to. He says in verse 8, "don't be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." So the idea is not to pray longer, not to say more and more and more words, that's at best secondary. How long you pray doesn't matter if you're not praying well. If you're praying well, time will take care of itself. So Jesus here in this passage in verses 6 through 8, he is teaching us to focus on loving God and trusting God, not to focus on how long we pray. He is teaching us to pray with trusting expectation and loving expectation that our heavenly Father is going to hear and is going to respond.

Look at what he says in verse 6, "when you pray, your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." He focuses your attention on the omniscience of God. When you pray, remember that God sees you and when you're focused on the fact that God sees you, you pray differently, you pray better.

Look at verse 8, he focuses on the providential loving care of God. He says, "Don't use this meaningless repetition like the Gentiles do." Don't measure the quality of your prayer by the quantity of the words that you use. Don't be like that. "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." God sees. God cares. God rewards those who pray in loving trust toward him.

Do you believe that? If you believe that, you pray differently. You don't insult the intelligence of the omniscient God by simply rote going through your mechanical prayer list day after day after day and check that off as if that were real prayer. Better to pray 10 minutes, better to pray 20 minutes while giving your full attention to God's character and trusting him than to pray for an hour while your mind is continually drifting off to your task list for the coming day. I'm making a bigger point than time management here. We need to think about the way that we pray and realize that when we are distracted, when we are thinking about other things while our lips are moving, that that's not real prayer; that that's meaningless repetition. If you meant it, your mind would be engaged in it.

So that's why I say we need to seek to pray better, not longer. When we open our lips in the presence of God, we need to do so in a way that our minds are engaged and we need to do so in a way that honors him; that honors his omniscience; that honors his love for us and reflects the fact that he sees and he gives his attention to what we say, then it is only fitting that I in response give him my attention when I speak. Start there. And the truth of the matter is that that's harder than just staying in one place for a longer period of time because that takes effort; that takes mental energy; that takes constantly renewing your heart and keeping these things fresh in your mind. But that's what God is worthy of, to love him with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind; to give him the full energies of our mental faculties as long as we have them and to give him the full energies of our heart affections rather than slopping out some time that we're really not serious about. That's the point. It would be better for you to be serious for 10 minutes than to be distracted for 60. That's what Jesus is saying here. Forget the meaningless repetition, develop trust and love and expectation when you go to your Father in heaven in prayer. So seek to pray better, not longer.

Fourthly: seek God's priorities, not your own. Seek God's priorities in prayer, not your own. Jesus, having said don't pray like the Gentiles, that negative instruction, says, "That is the wrong way to pray," in verse 9, he pivots and he says, "Here is the positive way to pray. Here's what I actually want your mind to be engaged in. Here are the themes that should frame your prayer life on an ongoing basis until God takes you to heaven. Pray, then, in this way," he says. Now look, I understand, I am as much one to do this as you are, that when you catch onto the fact that God is omnipotent, that he is all-powerful, that he can change things in an instant, when you're mindful of that, you have a perverted tendency to want to shift that to your own advantage and say, "Man, life is kind of hard right now. I don't like these particular circumstances. Hey, God is all-powerful, you know, if he would just do what I want him to do, the discomfort of this could be taken away. So, God, here are the circumstances, please do this to change them or even more certainly, here is this difficult person, would you please change them and then life would be good?" And we're using prayer to advance our own agenda. Jesus said, "Don't pray that way." Jesus said, "Pray this way."

Jesus taught us something completely different. Prayer is not a mechanism for you to manipulate God so that life goes to your own advantage and shame on us for treating it

that way. That's terrible when you think about it. No. No, you say, "Okay, okay, I get that. Let's not go any further because this is really making me feel uncomfortable and guilty." What are God's priorities then in prayer? What is it that we have been commissioned to seek in prayer? Jesus is commissioning us to a lifetime of prayer in accordance with certain principles here when he tells us to pray then in this way and I go back to the authority of Christ when I say this. Look, this isn't optional. This isn't something given to us as a menu of options for us to consider and if we don't like it we can go back to our selfish way of praying so that we can try to manipulate God to do what we want. That is not the point of Jesus teaching with absolute authority as the divine Son of God. He is telling us this, "Pray this way. This is how I want you to pray as my disciple. I am commanding you to pray this way." We are not at liberty to make it up, something different. We are not at liberty to present strange fire at the altar of God and expect it to be acceptable to him. If you want to meaningfully pray, if you want to have a prayer life that matters to God, you pray like this.

You pray in response of the authority of Christ and what does Christ say? What are God's priorities in prayer as Jesus expresses them? We'll break it down into two sub point here. Your first priority in prayer, the priority of God in prayer is the priority of his own honor. The priority of God's honor is the first priority of prayer. Look at how Jesus expresses it in verses 9 and 10, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" I know these are familiar words to you but I want you to see them in this context that we are discussing here today. The priority of God in prayer is the priority of his own honor and if we love God for saving us from sin, if we love him for his own intrinsic worth, if we love him because we have been born into his spiritual family, then his honor is going to be more important to us than anything else and we're going to seek the advance of his honor rather than the advance of our own agenda as our first priority in prayer. That's what this means and so you go to prayer saying, "God, I want to see your name exalted. O God, I want to see your kingdom come. Would you have Christ return and in the meantime win souls into your kingdom? And, God, I want to see your will be done. I want to see you work out your purposes in everything around me. And I want to see my own heart submitted to obedience to your will. I want your will expressed, Lord, because the priority of my heart when I come before you in prayer is your honor. So, God, I am desperate to see your name exalted more than it is now. I want to see other people giving you the honor that you deserve rather than seeing this world drive darker and darker into sin. I want people to love you, Father, because I know that you're worthy to be loved. I love you, not perfectly but I do love you and I want others to know the greatness of your name. So, God, exalt your name. That's my desire. That's my prayer when I come to you, Lord. I want to see Christ ruling. I want to see your will expressed." That's the priority of a Christian's prayer life, the priority of God's honor.

I'll ask it gently: did you pray that way this week? Was that central in your affections as you thought about God and prayed to God? "God, I just have to see your name advanced." That's the priority. That's not secondary. That's not an add-on at the end of the laundry list of your requests. My suggestion if you're really tied to a prayer list for this week, my suggestion to you, this is, "Thus saith Don," not, "Thus saith the Lord": tear up

your prayer list. I mean, literally, physically rip it in half and just tear it up and start over and say, "Lord, I want to come back to the freshness, the clarity of what Christ expressed and that means I'm going to set aside these other things knowing that you'll take care of them and you're going to find my heart pursuing your honor when I pray this week because that's what I care about, that's what my passion is, Lord. And I repent of the self-centered, self-promoting ways that I have prayed. Lord, I have prayed like our world lives: advance me, advance my purposes, advance what I want. So I repent of that, Lord, and I'm going to seek your honor instead." That's God's priority in prayer. Do you know what? If some of you will do that, I'm pretty sure God will bless that.

Secondly, there is a sense of horizontal, earthly focus in our prayer life but it's not what we make it out to be too often. When you're seeking God's priority, you're seeking the priority of his honor, secondly: you're seeking the priority of your own holiness. Your own holiness. Look at verses 11 through 13 there in chapter 6. Jesus says, "Give us this day our daily bread." That's an expression of dependence for the necessities of life. That's a legitimate part of prayer but it's one small theme in a bigger theme. Look at what he says in verse 12. Look at the focus on sanctification. Look at the focus here in verses 12 and 13 of a desire to live a holy life. Verse 12, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." It's a confession of sin. It's a recognition that your life has fallen short and, "God, I ask you to forgive me of that and, oh, by the way, I'm not harboring bitterness toward others when I say that. I'm not asking you to forgive me when I myself won't forgive those who have wronged me. No, Lord, I don't pray that way anymore. No, God, forgive me of my debts and I come not conscience of any bitterness against my brothers." And then verse 13, he says, "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." It's looking forward. It's saying, "Lord, I realize that there are opportunities for sin all around me, inside me and outside of me. There are all kinds of pulls and temptations toward sin and, God, what I ask you is that my priority in prayer now, I ask you to keep me from that because I know that my holiness is important to you and therefore because I am going to line up my life and my prayer in accordance with your priorities and in accordance with the authority of Christ, I am asking you, God, I am begging you, keep me from sin today. When temptation comes, make it unpleasant to me. Providentially order my steps so that I am away from those who would pull me into sin and I'm with those who would encourage me toward godliness. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to dishonest gain, as the Psalmist prayed, because, Lord, I realize I am prone to wander and so I'm asking you to exercise your divine power in the direction of my holiness."

Now, listen: like you, I have felt and I feel the impatience of wanting God to change adverse circumstances in my life, those things that I perceive to be adverse; I want it to be one way and it's not and so, "God, do something about it." But listen, it is a huge turning point for your spiritual life when you pivot away from that, when you pivot away from your circumstances and say, "God, no matter what happens, let your name be honored and help me not to sin. If these circumstances are what you have ordained for me, Lord, I accept that. I'm going to move beyond asking you to change these circumstances that I like, and I'm going to pursue something that is more in accord with what Jesus taught me to pray. I'm going to ask you to glorify your name through my life in this even if nothing

changes. I'm going to ask you, dear God, to help me live a holier life today than I did yesterday because it is more important for me to be holy than it is for me to be happy." I'm asking you to embrace that as the way that you approach prayer, not just for today but as the foundational way that you approach your walk with God.

Now, I say I'm asking you for that, understand that in the text of Scripture, Jesus is commanding that. I'm asking you to do what Jesus commanded. Why don't I just get out of the way: this is what Jesus calls you to. Will you live that way? Will you pray that way? Will you set your affections in that direction? Look, I realize the bar for some of you in the things you find yourself, that's a high bar. Look, understand, go back to verses 6 and 8: your Father knows what you need before you ask him; your Father sees what is done in secret. God already knows. God intends you to live a holy life in the midst of those circumstances and he want you to orient your approach toward him in prayer to be in line with what he ordains. Pivot away from asking God to change your circumstances, beloved, and say, "Lord, I see it. It's more important for your name to be honored than for this to change. It's more important for me to be holy than for this to change and so that's what I'm going to focus my prayer on and then I'll trust you for the rest."

Now, point 5. When you pray that way, point 5: expect his blessing. Expect his blessing especially in adversity. As you pivot toward praying this way, as you focus the affections of your heart in this direction, you should condition your heart to expect the blessing of God on you as you seek him in prayer. Look at Matthew 7:7-11 where Jesus says, "Ask, keep on asking is the idea. Keep on asking. Make this a pattern of life, "and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?" Who would be that perverse? "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" I mean, on a human level you understand that no one acts in that kind of perverse way and so look at what Jesus says in verse 11 as he's teaching us on prayer. He says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" These promises in that passage I just read are for those who are praying according to God's priorities. It's not a promise that you're going to get everything that you ask for, it's a promise that when you seek the honor of God in prayer and you seek your own personal holiness in prayer, God is going to grant that to you. It's a promise of spiritual reward for spiritual people, not earthly reward for selfish people.

Which one are you? Which one are you because God is always blessing his children and you will see his blessing in time even if his providence seems to be frowning on you at the moment. All the more when providence is difficult, you persevere all the more and you lay hold of these promises. "God, you said that you see. God, you said that you care. God, you say that you give good things. I'm going to keep asking until I see that and then when you have delivered that in accordance with your promise whether it's next month or 10 years from now or whatever, you're going to find me, God, though I'm asking now, when I see it delivered from your hand, you're going to find me at the other end giving you thanks and praise for your goodness and faithfulness to your word. That's the

conviction of my heart. That is the settled way that I am going to deal with my walk before you because I expect your blessing. I know that you will do what you say."

Final point here as we close this morning: remember the warning of Christ. Remember the warning of Christ. Jesus is teaching with authority. As I used to say when I was going through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches for keeps. He means what he says and there will be an accounting; there will be consequences for the way that we respond to his words. Look at chapter 7, verse 21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I," I, Jesus, "will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock." Verse 26, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell - and great was its fall." Understand that when Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, he was cultivating spiritual priorities and cultivating spiritual matters, spiritual priorities for his disciples and he says when you act on those things, when you are pursuing those matters of the heart, when judgment comes, you'll stand. But remember the warning that is stated here, beloved. Remember the warning that is stated here. We can't go on our way in light of these words and do it our way and expect things to go well for us in judgment in the end. Jesus will not tolerate that mocking of his authority. Jesus will not tolerate the lipservice that says, "Lord, Lord," and then lives our own way. He makes that very clear. We take him seriously and we conform even our prayer lives to his teaching.

So if your life is marked by an indifference to Christ, an indifference to this spirit of prayer that he lays out here in the Sermon on the Mount, let this hour this morning be that call to wake up. Wake up, beloved, and repent of your sin and come to saving faith in Christ because his atoning sacrifice can wash away even your sin and make you fit for heaven. For those of you that know Christ, love him, convicted by your failure and yet drawn to the aspirations that what Christ lays before us as we have expressed it here this morning, let these principles refresh your prayer life so that you can have a deeper intimacy with the one who loved you and gave himself up for you.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we recognize the authority of your Son and we embrace the responsibility to conform all of our lives including our prayer lives to what he says. We come to you in a spirit of repentance knowing that we have fallen short; even this day, even this week, Father, our lives have not been all that they should have been. We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, and we repent of that. In the light of your word, in the light of the presence of Christ among us now, Father, we realize how awful that is and we confess it before you and trust Christ and his shed blood to be that which would

cleanse us from sin and make us fit for your presence; make us fit to go forward. Lord, help us to pray better, not simply longer. Help us to pray in accordance with your priorities. Make it the affection, the dominating affection of our heart to see your honor advanced and to see our holiness advanced and then, Lord, wherever our circumstances fit in that matrix, we're happy to live with that; as long as you are honored and as long as we are growing in holiness, Lord, we'll be content. We expect you to bless that. We trust you. We're asking for things they you yourself have commanded and so we expect you to bless that and to bring it to pass, mindful that Christ has warned us to take his word seriously. We do, Lord. Oh, we do. We take your word seriously and we ask you to conform our lives to it, convict us when we fall short, and help us as we seek to live in accordance to what you would find pleasing in your sight. We do love you. We do want to walk closer with you. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you loved us and gave yourself up for us and we pray that as we go forth you would bless what we have taken into consideration today to set a new trajectory, a better trajectory than what we came in here with. And for that we give you thanks and praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

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